

The Minority the Government Can't Recruit



Frustration builds over federal failure to hire Hispanics

Hispanics remain the only minority group that is underrepresented in government when compared to their numbers in the nation's overall labor force and the gap is widening as the nation's Hispanic population growth continues to out-pace other population segments.

According to the latest diversity report by the Office of Personnel Management, "2003 Federal Equal Opportunity Recruitment Program Report," agencies made little progress recruiting Hispanics last year and actually lost ground when compared to the increase of Hispanics in the national labor pool. Hispanics comprise 7 percent of the permanent federal workforce, up slightly from 6.9 percent a year ago. However, their availability in the national labor pool rose from 12.2 percent to 13.1 percent during the same period. Blacks make up 10.4 percent of the civilian labor force and comprise 17.6 percent of the permanent federal government workforce. The percentages for Asian Americans are 4.5

and 4.5, while Native Americans make up 0.6 percent of the civilian labor force and hold 2.0 percent of federal jobs.

"If you have increases of that magnitude, where federally employed Hispanics have gone up year to year by less than 1 percent, then you are never going to have Hispanics represented at the same level as the civilian labor force," said Jorge Ponce, co-president of the Council of Federal Equal Employment Opportunity and Civil Rights Executives.



Ponce said the EEOC appears to consider the complaints process more important than the affirmative action responsibility that agencies have. "Only six pages of the commission's 356-page report are devoted to the representation of minorities and women in the work place. Most of the report analyzes agencies' processing of discrimination complaints," said Ponce. "Federal agencies are still looking for the magic answer. Instead of concentrating on taking some proactive steps, they're trying

to find the panacea by writing 200-page reports that just collect dust on agency bookshelves. It's time to deliver."

The lack of Hispanic representation in the federal workforce has frustrated Latino community leaders for more than 30 years. Since 1970, when President Richard Nixon made the first real attempt to address the issue with his "Sixteen-Point Program for the Spanish-Speaking," the effort has survived changes in name and emphasis, but the disparity has only grown larger over time.

In 1978, Congress established the Federal Equal Opportunity Recruitment Program Report to secure a more accurate picture of the government's progress in hiring and retaining workers of color. Since then, the government's minimally supported Hispanic Employment Program, which involves Latino employee representatives from most federal departments and agencies, has provided some outreach and employment training to build Hispanic representation.

Hispanic federal employees, however, continue to be concentrated in the lower and middle General Schedule Ranks. Hispanics make up only 4.3 percent of federal employees in the GS 13-15 grades, the highest on the GSR scale, and just 3.4 percent of all Senior Pay positions. Although Hispanic men are better represented (4.1%) among federal employees than Hispanic women (2.9%), Hispanic women outnumber Hispanic men in the lowest GSRs.

"It certainly cannot be said that progress has been made," said Manuel Mirabal, chairman of the National Hispanic Leadership Agenda, a coalition group that includes the heads of 30 of the nation's most influential national

Hispanic organizations. "The change has to come from the top."

Manuel Oliverrez, president of the National Association of Hispanic Federal Executives, said failure to hold hiring officials accountable for increasing the number of minorities is the main culprit. Many agencies include diversity or equal opportunity elements in their executives' performance evaluations, but Oliverrez said he knows of none that actually withholds bonuses, promotions or training opportunities from executives who fail to hire and promote minorities.

"Until federal officials are held accountable, the numbers are not going to change," said NAHFE vice president Gil Sandate.

U.S. Rep. Hilda Solís (D-Calif.) believes the Bush Administration should do much more. She maintains that the current shortage of Latinos at policy levels in key departments within the executive branch is having an effect on cutbacks in programs that promote diversity.



The cost of underrepresentation

Brent Wilkes, executive director of the League of United Latin American Citizens, the nation's oldest and largest Hispanic membership organization, said the poor showing by Hispanics in federal offices translates into Hispanics being underserved by federal programs.



"Agencies chronically underserve the Latino community, which is no surprise because

Hispanics are underrepresented in the federal workforce," he said. "We don't get our fair share of the resources because there's nobody looking out for us."

Gabriela Lemus, director of policy and legislation at LULAC, said that education, health care and economic status of Hispanics are LULAC's three principal concerns. Yet, she points out, the Departments of Education (4.3%), Health and Human Services (3.5%), and Commerce, which includes the Minority Business Development Agency (3.4%), have the lowest percentages of Hispanic employees in the federal bureaucracy.



"We are seeing a disengagement of the Latino community with

the federal government," said Larry González, Director of the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO). "When you have underrepresentation, you don't have anyone at the table to engage the community."

González believes it's time for the community to engage more as well. "As community advocates, we also need to play a more active role in helping our community know that federal jobs are stable, well-paying jobs," he said. Permanent jobs in the federal government pay a range of \$15,625 annually for GSR-1 to \$113,674 for GSR-15 positions. Senior Pay posts carry salaries of well over \$100,000.

"There are tens of thousands of job vacancies right now with the federal government," said González. "The Hispanic community offers a vast pool of talent that federal agencies should be tapping into."

Best practices in Hispanic recruitment

According to Jeffrey Vargas, chair of the National Council of Hispanic Employment Program Managers, the technology is available to track applications in recruitment pools.

"Agencies need to do a better job in tracking the race and national origin of their job applicants. It's through an effective tracking program that you get a real sense of the effectiveness of recruitment and outreach efforts," said Vargas. "Commitment is demonstrated when you integrate diversity into your overall Human Capital Management Initiatives."



Most experts don't believe there are particular challenges to recruiting Hispanics as compared to blacks or other minority groups. Agencies that have succeeded in recruiting large num-

Hispanic Representation in the Federal Workforce

	Hispanics	% in Grade
GSR 1-4	4,281	8.2%
GSR 5-8	32,472	9.1%
GSR 9-12	40,000	7.3%
GSR 13-15	15,008	4.3%
Senior Pay	523	3.4 %

Breakdown of Federal and Civilian Labor Forces

	Federal	Civilian
Hispanics 7.0%		13.1%
Blacks	17.6%	10.4%
Asian/PI	4.5%	4.5%
Native Am.	2.0%	0.6%
Women	44.0%	46.5%

Hispanic Representation in Executive Branch Agencies

Homeland Security	22.8%
Justice	8.5%
Treasury	7.6%
HUD	7.2%
Labor	7.0%
Air Force	6.8%
Veterans Admin	6.6%
Army	6.6%
Transportation	5.9%
Energy	5.6%
Agriculture	5.4%
Defense	5.4%
Interior	4.9%
State	4.6%
Navy	4.4%
Education	4.3%
Health, Human Services	3.5%
Commerce	3.4%

The Minority the Government Can't Recruit

Continued from page 17

bers of Hispanics and other minorities appear to have three things in common: commitment from top leaders, links between increasing diversity and meeting agency performance goals, and targeted use of special hiring tools.

Presence of Hispanics is greatest in the new Department of Homeland Security (22.8%), which absorbed the Border Patrol and Customs, where need for Spanish skills is high. Next come the Justice Department (8.5%) and Treasury (7.6%). Vargas and Ponce mention the Labor Department and Social Security Administration as having success in hiring Hispanics because, they said, they have had a focused commitment and have tracked their results.

Hispanics comprise 7 percent of the Labor Department's workforce. Thirteen percent of the 30 candidates selected so far for Labor's MBA Fellows Program, which aims to recruit future agency leaders, are Hispanic and Hispanics are represented in large numbers in a mentoring program for employees from GS-11 to the SES.

"We make every effort to cast as wide a net as possible and we coordinate programs departmentwide, so they have the attention of the assistant secretaries and senior managers," said Patrick Pizzella, Labor's assistant secretary for administration and management.

Several years ago, the Social Security Administration determined that the agency would be unable to meet its mission without having a work force that represents the people it serves. Once a month, SSA's civil rights office prepares a one-page report for agency executives that tracks the diversity of the workforce.

"It gives everybody an idea of what accomplishments have occurred," said Fred Glueckstein, SSA's national recruit-

ment coordinator. "It is a simple but effective tool to help show diversity over a period of time."

One of SSA's advantages is that it has nearly 1,500 offices nationwide, which makes it easier to attend a local job fair or visit a college campus. The SSA targets schools with large Hispanic enrollments, advertises job openings in Hispanic media, and recruitment officials visit Puerto Rico once a year to target job candidates. The agency's recruitment brochures and materials reflect a diverse work force, and many are printed in Spanish.

More than 19 percent of the employees the agency hired in 2003 were Hispanic and Hispanics comprise 11.6 percent of SSA's workforce.

"Agencies should meet with human capital leaders from these agencies to find out more about their diversity programs," Ponce said. "And agencies should embark on a massive recruitment effort, staffed by diverse teams that include Hispanics. If you don't have Hispanics represented in recruitment trips, applicants will get the idea that agencies aren't very serious about hiring Hispanics."

Connecting opportunities with the labor pool

At the National Institutes of Health, a large bureau of Health and Human Services, less than 4 percent of agency employees are Hispanic. Pedro Morales, NIH's assistant director for minority corporate outreach and recruitment programs, said the main challenge for NIH is finding candidates with the required education for its scientific and technical jobs. A bachelor's degree is a minimum qualification for most jobs, including administrative support positions, while applicants for research and grant-writing positions must have doctorates.

NIH is working to improve its minority hiring by building a pipeline of future employees. A scholarship program pro-

vides up to \$20,000 a year in tuition for undergraduate students with low incomes who commit to work at the agency after earning their degree. Another program directed to students preparing for graduate school is attracting students from Puerto Rico. The University of Puerto Rico, which graduates large numbers of Hispanic students with scientific and engineering backgrounds, is a prime source of job applicants. "We're doing what it takes to make sure minority students and Hispanics are part of the future," Morales said.

Nancy Kichak, deputy associate director of OPM's Center for Workforce Planning and Policy Analysis, said agencies could be making more and better use of various special hiring programs that are available, especially those for recruiting interns and developing future leaders. "There are many hiring tools out there the agencies don't know they have available to them," she said. "We are working with agencies to educate them as to the tools that they're not using."

Ponce indicated one such tool granted by OPM to federal agencies since June 20, 2003, is direct hire authority to appoint candidates to jobs in medical occupations and information technology management at the GSR-9 level and above. These are jobs for which OPM has determined there is a severe shortage of candidates or a critical hiring need. "Federal managers can take full advantage of this hiring flexibility to increase the diversity of their workforces," said Ponce.

Vargas and González also propose following and guiding applicants through the rigorous application process.

"The real challenge is finding a way for our technology and applicants to meet. We can track applicants but we haven't nurtured relationships that lead to a quality pool of applicants," said Vargas. "Building these relationships is key to recruiting Hispanics."